

Chapter One Introduction

Purpose of This Report

The *Northgate Area Comprehensive Plan* (Northgate Plan) was adopted by the City Council in August 1993. The planning effort was initiated by the City Council in December 1989 in response to community and business concerns about traffic congestion and projected amounts of growth. The Plan addresses the period between 1992 and the initial operations of a regional high capacity transit system (after year 2002).

The section of the Plan entitled “Relationship of the Plan to Other City Policies” calls for specific follow-up and evaluation of the plan. The purpose is:

“To ensure compatibility with the citywide Comprehensive Plan, once it is adopted, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the Northgate Area Comprehensive Plan...”

To implement this, the City Council directed that two specific steps be taken by the City’s Planning Department. These steps are:

- a) *“Within six months of adoption of the citywide Comprehensive Plan and implementing ordinances, and of the final Growth Management Act deadline, report to Council any changes in the Northgate Plan necessary to reconcile it with the Comprehensive Plan and implementing ordinances.*
- b) *Five years after adoption of the Northgate Plan, analyze implementation of the Northgate Plan, and report on commute trips, building permits, changes in open space, external/ regional factors (rail, economy), difficulties in implementation (including permit review), and achieving the intent of the plan. This report shall also examine potential applications of Northgate policies, regulations and strategies on a city-wide basis.”*

This report analyzes implementation of the Northgate Plan to date, with respect to the broad objectives of the Plan as well as the sixteen specific policies in the Plan. Emphasis is given to the specific data and qualitative analysis requirements called for in the 1993 Northgate Plan.

This evaluation is meant to assist and inform future planning and implementation efforts. The report includes recommendations for making the Northgate Plan more effective in achieving its objectives. These recommendations are meant to inform and assist City decision makers and citizens in defining next steps for implementing or updating the plan.

Organization of This Report

- Chapter 1 is an introduction to this report, the Northgate Plan, and comprehensive planning related to Northgate.
- Chapter 2 discusses planning and development activity since adoption of the Northgate Plan.
- Chapter 3 analyzes and evaluates the implementation of the policies in the 1993 Northgate Plan, covering land use, transportation, open space, drainage, financing, human services and community facilities topics. Under each policy, the discussion includes:
 - ⇒ a summary of the vision, policy and implementation guidelines;
 - ⇒ a discussion of actions to date in the implementation of each policy;
 - ⇒ a brief summary of the range of public comments and opinions;
 - ⇒ an evaluation of the relative effectiveness of the policies, and the implications of noted issues; and
 - ⇒ SPO recommendations for further actions to promote implementation of the Northgate Plan.
- The appendices contain summaries of public comments about the Northgate Plan, technical data supporting analysis in the report, and background information.

Plan Vision and Overview

The Northgate Plan addresses a planning area approximately bounded by NE 85th Street to the south, Ashworth Avenue N. to the west, NE 130th Street to the north, and Lake City Way to the east. The Northgate Plan document contains a vision statement (page 2) which the plan seeks to achieve for this area:

“The vision of the Northgate Plan is to transform a thriving, but underutilized, auto-oriented office/retail area into a vital, mixed-use center of concentrated development surrounded by healthy single family neighborhoods. With the improvements in this plan, the Northgate area will become a place where people live, work, shop, play and go to school – all within walking distance. The surrounding single family neighborhoods will be buffered from the intense development in the core, but will have ready access to the goods, services, and employment located in the core via a range of transportation alternatives including walking, bicycling, transit and automobile. The improved alternative means of access, good vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and enhanced, interesting environment will contribute to the economic viability of the commercial core, attracting customers, visitors and employees.”

This vision statement provides context for understanding the Plan’s overall goals when looking at specific plan policies and implementing guidelines.

Format and Structure of the Northgate Plan

The Northgate Plan is organized around sixteen policy statements addressing land use, transportation, open space, development plans for large sites, possible high-capacity transit station, drainage, financing, human services and community facilities. Following each policy are more specific implementation guidelines containing strategies for achieving the intent of the policies. Additional text follows some of the guidelines to more fully explain details of the strategies mentioned in the guidelines. The policies, guidelines and explanatory text were used to write the Northgate Overlay District regulations in the Land Use Code (found in Chapter 23.71 of the Seattle Municipal Code) and other legislation to implement the Plan. Other strategies for implementing the recommendations of the Plan included policy directives to departments, changes in the City's Land Use Policies, and changes in the City's use of SEPA authority.

The appendix of the Plan document contains the resolutions and ordinances formally adopted by the City. The implementing legislation is cross-referenced in the Plan document. It is important to note that not all items in the Plan document were carried over to specific implementing legislation. The City Council deliberated for five months on which aspects of the Northgate Plan to implement, through legislation that provided policy directive, or actual Land Use Code requirements.

The following legislation was adopted to implement the Northgate Plan:

- *Resolution 28752* - This defined what constitutes the Northgate Area Comprehensive Plan. The Northgate Plan consists of policies listed in the resolution, Resolution 28753 and Ordinance 116771. This resolution also directs departments to implement identified guidelines when preparing budgets and work programs.
- *Resolution 28753* - This revised transit and bicycle classification maps of the "Seattle Comprehensive Transportation Program."
- *Ordinance 116770* – This ordinance: added many of the Northgate Plan policies to the Land Use Code (SMC 23.12); identified some of the Northgate Plan policies as SEPA policies from which SEPA substantive authority can be exercised in the Northgate Overlay area; and, added location criteria for Midrise 85' zones to the Land Use Code. The text of the Northgate Plan was included as an attachment to this ordinance.
- *Ordinance 116771* - This amended the "Seattle Comprehensive Transportation Program" Street Classification Map to reclassify NE 115th Street, between 15th Avenue NE and Lake City Way NE, as a Residential Access street.
- *Ordinance 116794* – This ordinance rezoned portions of the Northgate area.
- *Ordinance 116795* – This ordinance created the Northgate Overlay District and a new chapter in the Land Use Code to implement the district.

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan & Urban Centers Strategy

The City's 1994 Comprehensive Plan defined the Northgate area as an Urban Center. As part of the City's growth strategy, the City designated five Urban Centers along with a number of smaller "urban villages" to absorb much of the planned 20 year growth. The plan assigns 45 percent of future household growth and 65 percent of job growth to the five Urban Centers that are designated under City and countywide plans. Other urban centers include Downtown, First Hill/Capitol Hill, Uptown Queen Anne and the University District. These areas are intended to accommodate the densest commercial and residential development in the city, to meet minimum targets of 50 jobs per acre employment density and 15 households per acre residential density.

Geographically, the Northgate Urban Center is one of the smaller Urban Centers in the City with 410 acres. Today, Northgate represents a relatively small percent of the city's population and job base. The City's Comprehensive Plan includes growth targets of an additional 3,000 households and an additional 9,300 jobs in the Northgate urban center between 1994 and 2014. If achieved, growth meeting the targets in Northgate would nearly double 1990's population and employment by 2014.

Northgate Urban Center Statistics:

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| <i>Acreage:</i> | 410 acres ¹ |
| <i>Households:</i> | 3,291 ² |
| <i>Employment:</i> | 11,366 |
| <i>Density:</i> | 8.0 Households/gross acre |
| | 28 Jobs/gross acre |

As a result of the Northgate Plan adopted in 1993, commercially zoned property in the area is subject to development regulations of the Northgate Overlay District. The center also includes a Major Institution Overlay for Northwest Hospital. Located adjacent to the Urban Center is a second Major Institution Overlay – North Seattle Community College. Most of the center is zoned for neighborhood commercial development (NC3), with height limits ranging from 40 to 125 feet. Most of the Northgate Mall area has an 85-foot height limit. The area with 125-foot height limit is to the south between NE 100th St. and NE 105th St. The height limits decrease with distance from this core area. The height limit along 5th Ave. NE ranges from 40 to 65 feet. Many areas along the edges of the center are zoned for multifamily development, with a few very small areas of Lowrise 1, larger areas of Lowrise 2 and Lowrise 3, and a few large blocks zoned for Midrise development.

¹ Gross acreage includes all land within the boundaries of the village area, including public rights-of-way, public land, major institution lands, etc. (i.e., gross acre) One acre = 43,560 sq. feet. One square mile = 640 acres.

²From 1990 census.

State Growth Management Act & County-Wide Planning Policies

The City of Seattle's urban centers and growth targets were designated in accordance with County-wide Planning Policies adopted by King County in response to state growth management requirements. The County-wide Planning Policies were adopted by the Metropolitan King County Council in August 1994. The Policies provide a regional policy framework for local jurisdictions to follow through in their planning to implement the Growth Management Act (GMA). The Policies also contain development guidelines, standards and processes to be implemented by individual cities and King County, addressing topics including critical areas, land use pattern, community character, open space, and affordable housing. The City's 1994 Comprehensive Plan was determined to be consistent with GMA and County-wide Planning Policies requirements.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation, conclusions and recommendations in this report are based on research and analysis by Strategic Planning Office (SPO) staff, with the assistance of several City staff in other departments. Research for the report began in December, 1999, building upon prior research conducted to prepare a draft Neighborhood Plan Matrix. This included:

- gathering and analyzing available data on development and traffic trends;
- seeking relevant planning literature from national sources, regarding redevelopment of malls and commercial areas;
- reviewing information and commentary generated by land use decisions for the largest projects since 1993;
- consulting with City staff on planning activities and decisions pertaining to Northgate that have occurred since 1993;
- consulting with City staff for interpretations of current regulations;
- consulting with SPO staff that assisted in the original preparation of the Northgate Plan or in subsequent implementation efforts;
- circulating a draft report for internal review by departments; and
- attending public meetings and hearings pertaining to Northgate planning issues, including a meeting to discuss the scope of this report.

Notes on public comments

Following the release of the draft version of this evaluation, six comment letters were submitted by citizens, and one letter was submitted by the Seattle Planning Commission. These letters are reproduced in Appendices B and C, respectively.

Prior to preparing this evaluation, SPO staff conducted a scoping meeting on January 12th, 2000 attended by approximately 25 interested citizens, including several members of the planning committee that helped prepare the Northgate Plan. Comments were taped and noted in written form, and are summarized in Appendix B to this report. These comments also are represented in the citizen comments distributed throughout Chapter 3 of this evaluation.

Summaries of citizen comments are not verbatim representations, nor are they intended to be a complete record of all citizen comments made on Northgate planning issues over the past six years. Rather, they illustrate a range of public perspectives that are pertinent to the content of the Northgate Plan and its performance.

Note on data limitations

It is often difficult to obtain reliable, timely data for specific geographical areas such as Northgate. Data may be collected or reported intermittently, and may be widely scattered among many sources. Examples of data limitations in this report include:

- reliable area-specific employment data last reported in 1998;
- in several locations, traffic data are collected only for one week every few years;
- most available traffic data do not include turning movements; and
- the specificity of development data is constrained by the computer system used to track development permits.

Within the constraints of time, SPO staff have sought to obtain and interpret the available, relevant data to inform the evaluation of Northgate Plan implementation.